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THE LITTLEST ONE OF THE BROWNS BY SOPHIE SWETT



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THE LITTLEST ONE OF THE
BROWNS



"UNCLE JOSHUA TOOK THE BOX OUT."

Frontispiece

THE LITTLEST ONE OF THE BROWNS

BY

SOPHIE SWETT

AUTHOR OF "THE LOLLIPOP'S VACATION,"
"PENNYROYAL AND MINT," ETC.

Illustrated



BOSTON
DANA ESTES AND COMPANY

1900

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THE LITTLEST ONE OF THE BROWNS.

CHAPTER I.

BEE AND COUSIN ALBERT'S WIFE.

BEE was making an acorn tea-set, under the oak-tree by the gate, when she saw old Mrs. Janeway coming along the lane.

Now old Mrs. Janeway always asked a little girl her name, and, being deaf, made her repeat it.

When Bee was asked her name she always answered, "I'm the littlest one of the Browns."

Then, if Bob were there, she would blush and look at him to see if he were going to tell why she didn't say "Beatrice Brown."

Before the new minister and his wife came to tea she had to give Bob her whistling top to make him promise not to tell. (I think, myself, that it was very mean of Bob to take it, but he always has said that he meant to give it back to Bee as soon as he found out what made it whistle; but when he had found out why, it wasn't a top any longer!)



"BEE WAS UNDER THE OAK-TREE."

If one lisps, "Beatrice Brown" is not an easy name to say.

Old Mrs. Janeway was coming in. She would have hoarhound drops in her bag, but hoarhound drops are bitter as well as sweet. And Bob was there, and would be sure to say "Beatwis" right after one.

Bee ran around to the other side of the tree, where the visitor could not see her, and called softly to Ann, the cook, who was coming from the orchard with a pan of apples.

"I'm going over to Aunt Sallie's, Ann," she said.

Ann only nodded, absently ; Bee

was allowed to go over to Aunt Sallie's at any time.

She scampered across the road and across the field. She remembered, now, that she had begun to read a delightful story-book at Aunt Sallie's, two or three days before.

When she reached the house she opened the front door, which was never locked, and went through the hall to the library, which was also Uncle Joshua's study.

She opened the door softly. Uncle Joshua was almost always at his desk, and one must not disturb him. He had a gruff voice and fierce-looking whiskers, and seldom smiled at one; but he never

wanted to know one's name, and he always kept a box full of sticks of candy in the lowest drawer of his desk.

Whether he liked the candy himself, I cannot say, but there it always was, and he was almost sure to offer a stick to Bee.

He took the box out this morning as soon as Bee opened the door. He seemed to be very busy, and he only made a gruff little noise in his throat, and didn't look at her.

When he didn't look at her Bee had presence of mind enough to select a twisted stick, with a pink stripe, and that would be pepper-

mint. If she were looked at from under Uncle Joshua's shaggy gray eyebrows, she grew confused, and might take one that was all pink, and that would be clove, and not so nice.

It never happened to Bob to get a clove stick. He said that only a girl, and a silly one at that, was ever bashful.

Bee perched herself on the broad shelf of the old secretary, in the corner, with the peppermint candy and "Pippy's Warning," a beautiful story about a dog. She could have borrowed all the story-books in the old secretary, and carried them home, if she had wished to,

but there were so many of the Browns, and they were such lively boys and girls, that it was not easy to find a quiet corner in the house in which to read.

Bee had reached the place in the story where the old-clothes-man muzzled poor Pippy so he could not bark, and thrust him into his bag, when the door opened suddenly, and there stood Cousin Albert's beautiful new wife from the city, of whom Bee was very much afraid.

She wore a light blue silk wrapper, and its wide loose sleeves were lined with white satin, and had tiny white tassels on the points.

It was partly her clothes that made Bee afraid of her. No one in Pekoe wore clothes like that. And, all summer, when Bee came in from playing in the sand-bank, her oldest sister, Philena, had said, "Oh, *what* if Cousin Albert's wife should come over and see you looking like that!"

Now, as soon as she saw Cousin Albert's wife, Bee put the book over the little yellow spot on her apron — that meant peaches — and felt of her back hair to find out whether the bow had stayed on. (Alas! it hadn't.)

Cousin Albert's wife said that her baby's nurse, Viola, had gone

to bed with the toothache, and she wanted some one to take care of the baby while she went into the kitchen and saw that her real old lace was properly done up. She couldn't trust it to any one.

Uncle Joshua only made the little gruff noise in his throat, without looking up. He didn't seem to think anything of her real old lace.

"Beatrice, can't you take care of the baby?" asked Cousin Albert's wife.

Now if Bee was afraid of Cousin Albert's wife, she was more afraid of the baby! They hadn't any at home, and Bee was not much ac-

quainted with them. This one was very new, and it screwed up its little pinkish face and cried if you looked at it. And Bob said that a person never could tell what a baby would do.

To take care of one seemed such a great, awful thing to do!

"She's asleep. You will only have to sit by the cradle and rock it a little if she wakes," said Cousin Albert's wife, encouragingly.

"I'm—I'm afraid she will break," stammered Bee. "I'm always unlucky with dolls. And my hair isn't nice; the bow is lost off, and there are burdock burrs in it!"

Bee's face brightened as she said this, for she thought surely so elegant a person wouldn't want an untidy little girl to come near her baby.

"Oh, no matter. I'll lend you a comb. Come!" said Cousin Albert's wife.

Bee had never combed her hair in her life; but was a person with any pride going to own that to Cousin Albert's wife, who took her for a big girl? She laid down "Pippy's Warning." Then she slipped down from the shelf and followed the blue train upstairs.

There was a crumb of comfort

in the proud thought that she might live to tell Bob.

Bob himself, who was twelve, would not dare to take care of a baby.

CHAPTER II.

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OLD MRS. PENCE AND HER BASKET.

BEE followed Cousin Albert's wife into the chamber. There stood the baby's cradle, with the baby in it. Its little pinkish face was not screwed up to cry, now, but looked sweet and calm under its tiny white cap.

Bee sat down on a hassock beside the cradle, and when the baby's mother gave her a comb she took it just as if she always combed her own hair. She wished that she

had said nothing about the lost bow and the burdocks. It was pleasant to be thought a big girl.

"I don't think I shall break her," she said to Cousin Albert's wife as she was leaving the room.

"Oh, you mustn't touch her! Only rock the cradle softly if she wakes," said the baby's mother.

And off she went to take care of her real old lace, while Bee took care of the baby.

Bee pulled the burdock burrs carefully out of her hair and threw them out of the window. Then she again braided the snarly curls into a tight little braid. She thought that braids were more

stylish than curls, and one should be stylish who was taking care of such a baby as that. Its cradle quilt was of white silk, the cradle itself had a flounce of white lace, and the pillow was lace-covered.

It began to be very still and lonesome in the great chamber, after Bee had done her hair. Bob had said you never could tell what a baby would do, but this baby didn't do anything for a long time.

The littlest one of the Browns never sat still long, unless she had a book, but to-day she tried hard. There were chintz curtains at the windows, and she studied the little shepherdesses with flocks of sheep

so steadily that she remembers the pattern still. (I know this, for my story is as true as can be, and I am better acquainted with Bee than with any one else in the world.)

The baby stirred, then puckered up her little red button of a mouth, and cried fretfully. Bee rocked the cradle gently, but the baby continued its feeble little wail. Bee hoped that no one would hear. She didn't want Bob to be told that she couldn't take care of the baby. She sung, softly, "Hush, my dear, lie still and slumber," as old Ann, the cook, had sung to her when she had the mumps.

But the baby didn't seem to like

it; she "made up a face" and cried louder. Perhaps she was like Bob, Bee thought, and disliked to hear a person lisp.

She suddenly remembered that she had the peppermint candy in her pocket, and she broke off a tiny bit and put it into the baby's mouth. She did not know what babies ate, but surely any one would like peppermint candy! The baby ceased to cry, and opened her eyes with a queer little look of surprise. It must be a surprise, thought Bee, when one knows for the first time how good candy is!

The baby heaved a long sigh of

contentment, and slipped softly off to sleep.

Bee felt very proud. She wished that she were not too bashful to tell Cousin Albert's wife what to do when the baby cried.

The baby slept very quietly now. It was nothing to take care of a baby, thought Bee, when one knew how.

The room was very still and lonesome again. Bee began to think of her story-book, and to wonder whether poor Pippy ever got out of the old-clothes-man's bag, and home to his dear little master.

She concluded it would do no



“ANY ONE WOULD LIKE PEPPERMINT CANDY.”

harm to slip softly down-stairs, and get the book and read it while the baby slept. She tiptoed all the way, and shut the door carefully, carefully.

When she opened the library door again, Uncle Joshua looked up absently, made the gruff little noise in his throat, and took out the candy box.

“I’ve had one,” said Bee, honestly.

She hoped he would say “Take another,” but he didn’t; he looked at her, and smiled a little, and put the box away. Bee felt disappointed, but still she wasn’t sorry she had said it, because, as she

afterward explained to Bob, if she hadn't another stick of candy, neither had she any "mean feeling" about her. Even candy didn't pay for having a "mean feeling."

She thought she had returned "Pippy's Warning" to its shelf in the secretary, but when she looked it wasn't there. It took her several minutes to find out that, as she had hastily laid it down, it had fallen on the floor between the secretary and the wall.

She ran back, in breathless haste, afraid that the baby had awakened. But no sound came from the room.

When she had entered it and shut the door softly behind her, she saw that the pillow was tossed half-way out of the cradle, the silk quilt trailed upon the floor, and that there was no baby in the cradle!

Hot tears of shame rose to Bee's eyes. Cousin Albert's wife must have come in and found out that she had left the baby. She would think she could not be trusted!

Bee stood still, not having the courage to go in search of Cousin Albert's wife and the baby, and suddenly she caught sight from the window of old Mrs. Pence hurrying along the road.

Old Mrs. Pence was one of the "back folks," as the people were called who lived on the edge of the town. Bob had tried to make Bee believe that she was a witch, and carried off children. He said — oh, a dreadful thing! — that he had seen little legs sticking out of the great basket Mrs. Pence carried, — yes, several times.

Sometimes, after Bob had told her such a story as that, he would come and tell her that he had been "joking," so that it wouldn't be telling a lie. But Bob had never said he was "joking" about this. He always firmly declared that he *had* seen the little legs



“SHE WOULD FLY AND GET THE BABY.”

sticking out of old Mrs. Pence's basket!

Old Mrs. Pence did look like a story-book witch. Her face was brown and wrinkled, like a baked apple. She had a little hump on her back, and she was always talking to herself. But, of course, when a bright little Yankee girl is eight, she *knows* that there are no witches, except in story-books.

Old Mrs. Pence had her basket on her arm now, and held closely against her breast was a baby!

The baby was wrapped in her shawl, and had a veil over its face, but Bee saw a little lace cap and lovely yellow hair, such as she

had seen but a few minutes before in the lace-flounced cradle!

Old Mrs. Pence had come in at the front door, stolen softly upstairs, and carried off the baby, reasoned Bee, and started wildly after her. As she ran down the stairs, she heard Cousin Albert's wife's voice from an inner room: "Little Beatrice is taking care of the baby." But she could not give an alarm. She would fly and get the baby away from old Mrs. Pence, and no one need know what had happened!

CHAPTER III.

THE RIDE WITH THE TIN - PEDDLER.

EIGHT-YEAR-OLD legs can run fast, but eight-year-old strength gives out before long. It didn't seem likely that Bee would catch up with old Mrs. Pence, who was carrying off the baby.

She still kept screaming, and once old Mrs. Pence turned around as if she heard, and Bee could see the yellow of the baby's hair, and the flutter of the lace frill of its cap.

Oh, what would the baby's mother say? Dick Presho, the tin-peddler, came along, and stopped his rattling cart to look down at her in wonder. He asked her if she were going much farther, and if she didn't want to ride "a piece" with him; and Bee gladly perched herself up on the back of the wagon with the blue tubs. She said she was going out to the back road. She wanted to get the baby without telling anybody what had happened. While she ran she had planned to offer old Mrs. Pence the two dollars and sixty-nine cents in her bank, besides her bright new half-dollar, and her guinea hen.

She thought Bob would give her his pair of bantam chickens, perhaps even one of his peacocks. Bob would mimic you and say that girls were silly, but when you were really in trouble he would be pretty sure to help you out.

If old Mrs. Pence wouldn't give up the baby for anything that she could offer her, why, then — Bee shut her eyes and thought so hard that her head ached; why, then, she must go back and tell the baby's mother!

A great sob burst forth with this thought, but the rattling tins smothered the sound. They were in a woods road now, and suddenly

Bee saw a sight that made her heart dance.

Old Mrs. Pence had crawled through a rail fence to pick some late blackberries that hung temptingly upon the bushes, and had set down her great basket, with the baby upon the top of it, beside the road!

Bee slipped down from the wagon and seized the baby when old Mrs. Pence's back was turned.

It was an up-hill road, and the tin-peddler was driving slowly.

In one of the great blue tubs Bee laid the baby, and scrambled up beside it. She trembled, and



"BEE SEIZED THE BABY."

her heart beat like a trip-hammer, but the baby was safe!

If Dick Prescho would only drive a little faster, for now old Mrs. Pence was crawling back through the fence! After the wagon hurried old Mrs. Pence, shouting angrily:

“It ain’t mine! And it’s worth ten dollars!” was all that Bee could hear of what she said.

Dick Prescho didn’t see or hear her at all; his back was turned and the rattling tins were hung very near his ears.

The baby wasn’t hers! *She* knew that well enough, thought Bee. But what could she mean

by saying that it was worth ten dollars? Cousin Albert's wife's baby worth only ten dollars!

Oh, if Dick Presho would only start up his horse!

When the hill-top was gained, he did. Old Mrs. Pence was left, making wild gestures, in the road, far behind!

But after her first feeling of relief Bee began to realise that she was being rapidly carried along to the back road and old Mrs. Pence's house.

She thought it would be a good plan to take the baby in her arms, and slip off the wagon, and hide in



“MRS. PENCE SHOUTED ANGRILY.”

the woods before old Mrs. Pence came along.

But while she was thinking about it the tin-peddler suddenly stopped his horse, and called to Bee, looking back at her over the tops of the bristling brooms and nodding feather dusters.

“Look here, little girl, I wouldn’t go out to the back road all alone, if I was you,” he said. “We’re coming to the turn of the road, and you can, if you want to, but after I stop at Bailey’s Mill I’m going back by way of the turnpike road, and I can take you right home.”

“Oh, if you will take me right

back to Uncle Joshua's!" cried Bee, joyfully, "and please drive fast!"

The tin-peddler looked in some surprise at the little girl, who such a short time before had wanted to go to the back road; but he thought, perhaps, the loneliness of the way had scared her. And, for himself, he preferred to take her home rather than to leave her at the back road, where many rough people lived.

"Where did you want to go to, on the back road?" he asked her.

"To — to old Mrs. Pence's," faltered Bee. And to her great relief he didn't ask her what she wanted

to go to old Mrs. Pence's for — or, if he did, she could not hear him, for the horse started again, and the wagon began to rattle.

It was a wonder that the rattling noise didn't wake the baby. She was still wrapped from head to foot in old Mrs. Pence's shawl, and, when Bee peeped over the side of the tub, she was lying as still as a mouse and seemed to be fast asleep.

She lay so still that Bee began to fear that something was the matter with her. She remembered that she had felt very queer and stiff in her arms, when she had carried her, although she had been

too much excited at the time to think much about it. Old Mrs. Janeway had once told about her granddaughter's baby who had been given too much sleepy medicine by its nurse. It was a long time before it could be awakened and it was very ill afterward.

Bee was afraid that old Mrs. Pence had given sleepy medicine to this baby. She leaned over the tub to lift the baby out, but just then the wagon stopped at Bailey's Mills and Mrs. Bailey came out to buy some things of the peddler.

Bee pulled down a bunch of waving feather dusters until they hung over the blue tub like a

canopy, and she hoped — oh, how she hoped! — that Mrs. Bailey would only want tinware and would not come near the back of the wagon. She snuggled close to the blue tub and was as quiet as the baby while Mrs. Bailey bought a nutmeg grater and an egg beater and a quart dipper.

Then Mrs. Bailey said that what she wanted most of anything was a large blue tub!

And Bee's heart was in her mouth.

When the tin-peddler and Mrs. Bailey came around to the back of the wagon she lifted the baby out of the tub, but, in her hurry and

confusion, she unfastened old Mrs. Pence's shawl, and when that came off it pulled off the white cap and the veil. It was a great, doll baby that opened its blue eyes at Bee and said "Mama," in a squeaking little voice!

CHAPTER IV.

MRS. PETER BENT'S PUPPY.

BEE almost dropped the doll baby in her great surprise. The beating of her heart sounded pit-a-pit in her ears, and there was a choking lump in her throat.

Could Bob be right, and was old Mrs. Pence a real story-book witch, after all? Had she tapped the baby three times with her wand and turned it into this doll?

Now, of course, a sensible little

girl was not going to think *that* for long, however puzzled she might be. Yet things were happening as they do in a queer dream or in a story-book.

“Why, here is the little Brown girl,” said Mrs. Bailey, kindly. “And what a beautiful doll she has!”

Bee held the doll up before her face to hide the tears that were rolling down. Where, oh, where was Cousin Albert’s wife’s baby? Your heart could not be thrilled even by holding such a beautiful doll as this in your arms while it had such a dreadful ache about the baby!

“A talking doll, too!” said Mrs. Bailey. For the doll squeaked, “Mama! mama!” as Bee hugged it closely. “I saw one just like it that Olly Pence was dressing. She dresses dolls for that large store at Gobang. Olly is lame, so her mother goes after them for her and carries them home. I see old Mrs. Pence almost every week, with a basket of small dolls, and one of those large ones in her arms.”

The tin-peddler said he was glad that Olly had some work to do, for he supposed that she and her mother were very poor. And as Mrs. Bailey went into the house,

after buying all she wanted, he said to Bee:

“So you wanted to go to the back road to get Olly Pence to dress your doll, did you? I didn’t notice that you had a doll when I saw you running along the road.”

Bee stammered something in reply. She really couldn’t speak, she was thinking so hard.

It was this doll that old Mrs. Pence carried in her arms, all the time; this doll and not Cousin Albert’s wife’s baby!

She had not gone into the house and stolen the baby, as Bee had thought!

She carried dolls home in her

basket for her daughter to dress! They were dolls' legs that Bob had seen sticking out of the basket! And Bob must have known that they were!

Bob knew, too, that there were no witches! Bee liked a good witch in a story; she had owned that she did to Bob. She had talked a good deal about them. And Bob had taken advantage of this taste of hers for witches to scare her about old Mrs. Pence! Why had she not stopped to think that some one in the house might have taken away the baby — Aunt Sallie, or Viola, the nurse!

The doll's lace cap was just like

the baby's, and so was the yellow hair that she had seen under the veil; but still she knew she should not have been so hasty if it had not been for that story of Bob's that old Mrs. Pence carried away children!

"I guess you'd better get some of your folks to take you out to the back road," Dick Prescho said, kindly, as he prepared to drive on. "You're kind of small to be traveling 'round with such a big baby. I suppose that a doll like that is worth a good deal of money."

As the tin-peddler said this, poor Bee's eyes grew wide with a new fright. She had carried off a

valuable doll, and old Mrs. Pence thought, of course, that she meant to steal it! She must return it just as soon as possible. She would not be allowed to go out to the back road alone, but perhaps Bob would go with her. If she had to tell how foolish she had been, it would be easier to tell Bob than any one else.

There was this good thing about Bob; although he would mimic you and laugh at you, yet when you were in trouble he would seem to feel brotherly and manly, all at once, and try to help you out.

Every time that the sound of wheels made her fear that old Mrs.

Pence had sent an officer to arrest her, Bee longed for Bob. And when, as the tin-peddler stopped at Mrs. Peter Bent's, to sell his wares, Bob came riding along on his new bicycle, her heart thrilled and tears of joy came into her eyes.

She felt like hugging Bob — only Bob didn't like such attentions — and there was dear old Bevis, their big dog, with him.

Old Bevis was frisking like a young dog after Bob's new bicycle. Bee hoped that he wasn't so excited as to take any notice of Mrs. Peter Bent's great Newfoundland puppy, that had come out, barking madly.

She had slipped down from the

wagon, after tucking the doll carefully behind the rag-bags that had taken the place of the blue tub.



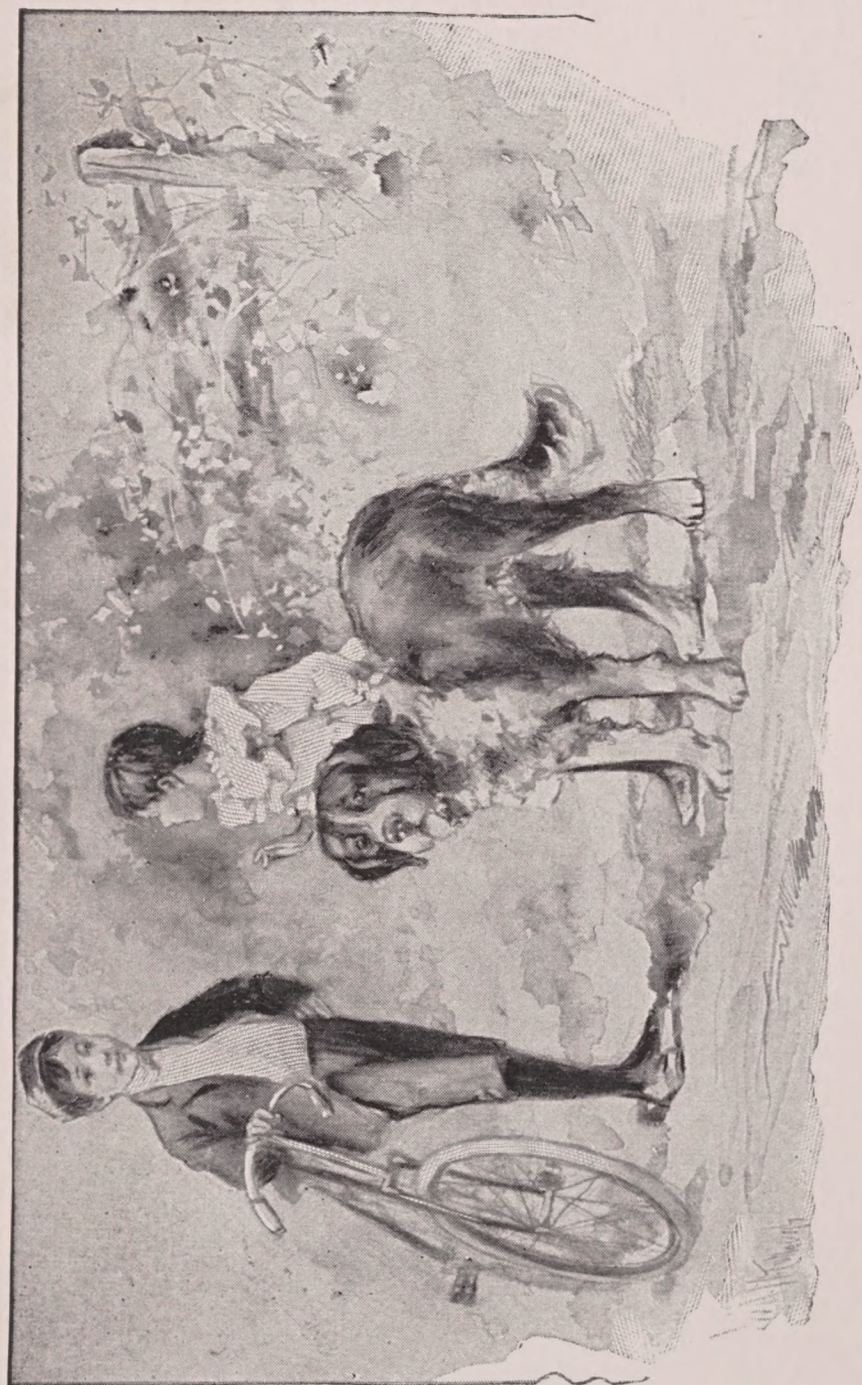
MRS. PETER BENT'S PUPPY.

“What are you riding round on the tin-wagon for? Mama won’t like it!” exclaimed Bob. “We thought you were at Aunt Sallie’s.”

Bee poured out the whole story, standing with one arm around her old dog's neck, partly to keep him away from Mrs. Peter Bent's puppy, partly because it made her feel braver.

"The idea of letting *you* take care of a baby!" said Bob. (But that was the only cruel thing he said.) "I should think you might have known what I meant when I said I saw little legs sticking out of old Mrs. Pence's basket! I knew that her daughter dressed dolls for the Gobang toy-store. Yes, I'll go with you and carry the doll back. Where is it?"

Mrs. Peter Bent's puppy was



“ WITH ONE ARM AROUND BEVIS.”

growling and barking, and he was shaking and tearing something.

The tin-peddler shouted at him, "Here, get away from my bags! that dog is always after my rag-bags."

But it was not a rag-bag that Mrs. Peter Bent's puppy had seized upon this time!

He dashed along the road with something yellow and waving in his mouth. A doll's hair!

"He has got the doll and torn her hair off!" cried Bob, who was nearest to him. "Whoa, there!" But the tin-peddler's horse, annoyed by flies, was restlessly

backing. The wagon-wheel went directly over the poor doll, with her curly yellow wig gone, that the puppy had left in the road.

CHAPTER V.

BOB'S PLAN.

BOB took the doll up from the road after Mrs. Peter Bent's puppy had torn off its pretty yellow hair and the wheel of the heavy tin-wagon had run over it.

Its head was quite bare, its cheeks very pale, — the paint being all licked off them, — and one of its legs came off in Bob's hand.

"Mam — mam," it said, in a feeble little squeak, when Bob pressed it.

"The wheel went over the rest of the 'mama,' you see," said Bob.

"Oh, what shall I do now?" sobbed Bee.

And even Bob didn't call her a cry-baby. To have carried off a doll that was worth so much, and have it ruined like that, was, as Bob said, "pretty bad business."

Mrs. Peter Bent said that puppy was so mischievous that she didn't know what she should do with him. But she shouldn't think Bee's mother would let her play with such a doll, every day, and she didn't think it looked pretty for a little girl to ride around on a tin-wagon, anyway.

Bob wrapped the remnants of the doll in old Mrs. Pence's shawl, which they found beside the road where the dog had tossed it.

And then, although he had started for Red Hill to see whether the chestnuts were ripe, he turned and walked home with Bee, wheeling his bicycle.

Old Bevis chased the puppy, and although Bob whistled and whistled he wouldn't give up the chase until he had made the puppy drop the doll's yellow wig. And Bevis brought it back in his mouth.

Bob put the wig into his pocket.

He said you never could tell when a thing would be useful.

He said he would take care of all that was left of the doll if Bee didn't mind; he should like to examine and find out what it was that had made it say "mama" before it was broken.

Bee said she never wished to see the poor broken doll again; she couldn't bear to.

Bob was very comforting as they walked home. He said that of course old Mrs. Pence must be paid for the doll just as soon as they could get the money. Ten dollars was a good deal, but they must manage to raise it.



BEVIS TO THE RESCUE!

He said *they*, taking a share of the trouble; which showed that he knew how to be a brother.

He said he would get the money out of his ten-cent bank; he thought there ought to be enough there to make five dollars, with what Bee had in her bank.

But the worst of those banks was that when you smashed them there never was as much in them as you expected.

Then he would go and tell Mrs. Gerry that she could have his peacocks; she had offered him five dollars for them. And then they would go straight out to the back

road and pay old Mrs. Pence for the doll.

When they reached home, Aunt Sallie, in her carriage, had just stopped at the door.

"There's little Bee!" she cried. "I came to see why she ran away. Was it because you didn't like to take care of the baby, Bee?"

"I didn't run away, or at least I didn't mean to run away," answered Bee.

And then she inquired anxiously after the baby's health; which all the other Browns, little and big, thought was so grown-up and polite of Bee that they looked at each other in surprise.

Aunt Sallie said that Viola's toothache had got well, so that she had gone in and taken the baby. She was sorry, she added, that little Bee had run away before the caraway cookies were out of the oven. She knew how much Bee liked caraway cookies.

Aunt Sallie went in, then, to see old Mrs. Janeway, and no one thought to ask Bee where she had been.

Bee was afraid that they would never trust her again at Aunt Sallie's, and yet she could not bear to tell why she had run away; they would think her such a very silly person for sup-

posing that the baby had been stolen.

“Never mind!” Bob said, when she told him this trouble. “They’ll find out that you’re not the running-away kind. You’re *not* that, you know. And any one would have been frightened to come in and find a baby gone. So don’t you mind!”

A compliment from Bob was so unusual that it quite cheered one.

But Bee could not eat the nice warm dinner that had been saved for her, not even though Ann put an extra portion of sweet sauce on the apple dumplings and sent in a slice of frosted plum-cake, a



"SHE SAW OLD MRS. PENCE."

pleasant little way that Ann had when she saw red rims around a person's eyes.

Bob was smashing the banks, on the flat stone under the dining-room window, — perhaps that was one reason why she could not eat; and he called to her that there was not four dollars in all!

They had kept those banks a long time; they had felt a pride in keeping them since they had been allowed to do just as they pleased with them. But there never was much in Bob's banks.

Bob said ten-cent pieces didn't count up, anyway, except when you were spending them.

“Well, anyway, there’ll be almost nine dollars with the five for the peacocks; and I’ll sell my bantams to Joe Rugg for a dollar and a quarter.” Bob said this, looking in at the dining-room window.

He said, too, that he didn’t think that old Mrs. Pence would come after Bee with an officer, because she was too nearly blind to have seen who she was.

And when he had gone to sell the peacocks and the bantams, Bee felt so much better that she ate the frosting off the plum-cake.

But she looked up, at the last

mouthful, and then rose from her chair, for she saw old Mrs. Pence coming, just as fast as she could, along the garden path.

CHAPTER VI.

OVER ON THE BACK ROAD.

OLD Mrs. Pence rang the door-bell as if somebody should hear!

Bee's mother had gone to drive with Aunt Sallie and old Mrs. Janeway. All the young Browns were out, and Phœbe, the maid who answered the bell, was up-stairs changing her dress. Bee stood still and waited. Oh, if Bob would only come with the ten dollars to pay for the doll!

Bob came, just as old Mrs. Pence rang the bell again, but his face was gloomy. Mrs. Gerry wouldn't buy the peacocks, he said, because her invalid sister didn't like to hear them squawk; and Joe Rugg wouldn't buy the bantams because his Plymouth Rock rooster would peck them.

Old Mrs. Pence rang the bell again.

Bee told Bob who it was at the door, and he went there directly. Bee, I am glad to say, was not far behind. Old Mrs. Pence was very much excited as she told of the loss of the beautiful doll-baby that her daughter was to have dressed

for a little invalid girl in Gobang. The tin-peddler had told her that a little Brown girl had stolen it,—the littlest one of the Browns.

It was Bee who told old Mrs. Pence the whole story, and that the doll looked *exactly* like a baby in her arms. And old Mrs. Pence, although she was angry, couldn't help laughing a little. She said she didn't want to make any trouble. Bee could just give her the doll and she would go home.

Bob explained that there had been an accident and they couldn't give her the doll. Without waiting for him to finish, old Mrs. Pence grew very angry, and said

the little invalid would cry her eyes out for the doll, and she would have to pay the ten dollars that it cost.

Bob drew himself up in a very manly way—it was surprising to see how tall Bob could look—and said they would carry her the ten dollars the next day.

When old Mrs. Pence had gone, Bee and Bob looked at each other, and Bob's forehead was so wrinkled that he looked like Grandpa Brown, who was eighty. "There's just one way to get out of it ourselves," said Bob. "Just one way!"

Bob sat astride the stair railing, and Bee braced herself against

the front door. She knew it was something dreadful that Bob had thought of by the way he looked.

"We can sell Bevis to Doctor Lawton for ten dollars!" said Bob. Sell Bevis! It was almost as bad, thought Bee, as if he had said sell any one of the Browns.

"I've had him longer than you have," said Bob, huskily. That was true only because Bob was older. Bee's first steps had been taken with her baby fist clinched in Bevis's shaggy coat. But Bob loved him, Bee knew that Bob loved him almost as well as she did.

"I'd rather tell papa!" Bee said, firmly.

“He’s having trouble enough, just now, with the strike at the mills, without your troubling him,” said Bob, “and he’ll never trust us again.”

Bob went out of the front door with that, but he turned back to speak a little more cheerfully. “We have until to-morrow to get the money, anyway. If any of the fellows come for me don’t you tell them where I am!”

That meant that he would be in his workshop, over the carriage house, where he was always taking something to pieces and putting it together again. Bob liked to do that, when things went wrong

with him. Bee was afraid he would forget all about the ten dollars.

Bob stayed in his workshop all the afternoon and evening, and wouldn't let Bee in when she knocked at the door. He didn't come in to his supper, and no one knew when he went to bed. When Bee carried some muffins and cream cakes to the door he only said, very crossly, "Go away." Bob liked muffins and cream cakes, too.

He slept late the next morning. Bee herself took Bevis down to Doctor Lawton.

Long ago her father had said they would better let Doctor Law-

ton have Bevis. The dog was old and there were so many noisy young Browns.

Doctor Lawton promptly gave Bee a ten-dollar bill, and told his man to shut Bevis up in the stable. He was going to send him to his little grandson, in another town.

When Bee got home with the money, Bob praised her, though in a rather gruff voice.

He told Bee she was more of a girl than he thought she was.

They set out at once for the back road. Bob had something done up in old Mrs. Pence's shawl, which they had forgotten to give her. He said it was some-

thing for old Mrs. Pence. Bee thought but little about it; her mother often sent something to the back folks. Besides, Bevis's cries rang in her ears all the way.

"Now you let me talk to old Mrs. Pence," said Bob at the door, when they reached the house and found both old Mrs. Pence and her daughter dressing dolls.

So many dolls together you never saw! Little and big, black and white, babies and ladies, and boys and men! They hung on lines across the room, they sat on the tables and chairs, they were piled in heaps on the floor.

But the great doll-baby that



"SO MANY DOLLS TOGETHER YOU NEVER SAW."

Bob, after a moment, drew out of the folds of old Mrs. Pence's shawl was the biggest and most beautiful of all!

There she was, with the pretty yellow hair under her lace cap, with her cheeks as red as ever, and her legs as plump! And when Bob pressed her, the doll-baby said, "Mama! Mama!"

It seemed to Bee, at first, that Bob was like the magician at the fair who took doves out of his hat when there were no doves there!

"She met with an accident, but I mended her," said Bob, modestly. "If you think she'll do —"

"Why, I don't see but that she

seems just as good as new!" said the lame daughter, taking her and looking her over, "and the little girl who owns her would rather have her than any new one!"

Old Mrs. Pence said she hoped she hadn't been hasty in her speech the day before, and the lame daughter made Bee a present of a delightful little wooden doll, a Dinah, with a red turban.

They passed Aunt Sallie's, on the way home. Cousin Albert's wife was in the window, with her blue silk wrapper on, and she had the baby in her arms. She took the baby's hand and made it throw a kiss to Bee.

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"BEVIS FROLICKED LIKE A PUPPY."

Bee thought she would go over and finish "Pippy's Warning," in a day or two. She wouldn't mind in the least now if they should ask her to take care of the baby! But first she and Bob would go and get Bevis!

Doctor Lawton smiled when Bee thrust the ten-dollar bill into his hand. He said they could have Bevis, — he didn't think Bevis would stay away from them, anyway. Bevis made a great uproar on the way home. He frolicked like a puppy and tumbled over them and rolled in the road at their feet and then rose and barked for joy.

When they got behind their own hedge Bee stopped and hugged Bob for a second.

Bob bore it pretty well. But he said, a little gruffly, that he hoped people wouldn't make any more fun of his taking things to pieces and putting them together again. He would frankly tell her now that he hadn't expected that he could mend that doll, — only a fellow that had had practice could have made its wig stick on!

THE END.

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